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Gender, visible bodies and schooling: cultural pathologies of childhood

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In this paper, I consider two interrelated problems. The first concerns the issues and difficulties involved in studying how children think about their bodies, in the schooling setting. The second involves an attempt to bring together a series of phenomena around which gendered media and social panics are being constructed in the UK and elsewhere.

I discuss the problems concerned with the practicalities of studying children's bodies in a setting in which the body is effaced. I argue that the problems arising from this effacement are compounded by children's embarrassment about their bodies, particularly in a situation in which bodies are supposed to be invisible. Related to this, I argue that children's and young people's bodies that are made visible in schools and other public or semi-public arenas are rendered pathological by that very visibility. I suggest that we can see all these metaphorically pathological bodies in terms of a failure of or resistance to the disciplinary institutions of the school and the family, and that such an understanding of 'problematic' bodies can help us to see what they have in common. I conclude with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: *Gender; Body; School; Research; Moral panic*

Introduction

This paper is about two interrelated problems that have been occupying me for some years now. The first concerns a practical issue: how can we study what children think about their bodies, particularly in the schooling context? The second is more theoretical, and arises from my awareness that there are a variety of ongoing panics about children and young people, all related in some ways to their embodiment, but which have all been addressed separately by researchers. I have tried to bring these areas together into an overall theoretical framework which incorporates them as instances of disciplinary body pathologies, as perceived failures of, or resistances to, disciplinary forces acting on the body. This paper is, therefore, about an overarching framework, which has large empirical gaps in it, and about some of the difficulties in filling those gaps.

In my own empirical research, the nearest I have come to being able to describe and explain how children understand their bodies is in a study of tomboy identities,[1] in which we considered how 9–11-year-old girls presented and altered their bodies

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through dress, make-up and hairstyle (Paechter, 2010). However, as I will explain later, we could approach questions of the body itself only obliquely, and the study brought home to me how difficult it is to research children's bodies overtly in such settings. Much of my work is centrally concerned with how children understand themselves as male or female, and bodily form is of course central to this. Most of it is also conducted within schools, partly because of ease of access and partly because I am particularly interested in how children understand themselves within the context of their peer group, so schools are a good place to think about that. The nature of schooling, however, and the ways in which children's bodies are understood in society more widely, make it difficult to investigate how children understand their bodies (Paechter, 2006). There are therefore considerable methodological problems with studying, or even taking into account, the embodiedness of children, and, in particular, with writing about what individual children's bodies are like.

Research, children's bodies and disciplinary institutions

Childhood is, among other things, a period in which a person undergoes a continuous training in bodily control, conducted through the twin disciplinary institutions of the family and the school. The underlying premise is that, in order to be able to take part in civil society, an individual needs to be able to govern her or his body and keep it within bounds (Shilling, 1993). There is thus a bodily disciplinary trajectory stretching from the development of control of basic bodily functions in infancy and early childhood, through to adult subjugation of body to mind, that takes place simultaneously and sequentially in the home and the school. Evans *et al*. (2008) argue, in the context of obesity discourse, that 'schools have become totally pedagogised micro-societies' (p. 17), in which state policies focusing on obesity, such as the Healthy Schools programme in the UK, act through the schooling system to subject children and young people to constant health surveillance. Similarly, the family functions as a site for disciplinary forces that is increasingly seen as key to the enactment of policy initiatives around children's bodies, for example as a target for interventions focused on combating child obesity by improving nutrition and exercise within families (Cross-Government Obesity Unit Department of Health and Department of Children Schools and Families, 2008).

Educational settings, schools in particular, have a strong disciplinary and contradictory relationship with the body. Although there is a rhetoric, reflected in the curriculum (Gard & Wright, 2005), that they are for the education of both body and mind for the most part schools efface or erase children's bodies. While they are at school, children, from a young age, are encouraged to suppress their bodily needs and desires, except at certain times. They are expected to spend a considerable part of the day sitting still and quiet, often (for children under eight) cross-legged on the floor, to move around only when deemed necessary or with permission, and only use the lavatories as specified break times (Nespor, 1997). In the UK, they are frequently required to confine their bodies in particular forms of clothing, which may be more

or less constricting, depending on the school. They are expected to comport their bodies in a disciplined manner, to hold them in a way that denotes respect for the teachers, to walk, not run, in the corridors, and hold only permitted discussions in quiet voices.

Because of this need for schooled bodies to be invisible, the visible body is understood as a problem. Foucault (1978) has pointed out the multitudinous rules, regulations and spatial disciplines for the control of children's sexualities within education, but the treatment of the visible body as something highly problematic goes beyond this. Bodies that become visible outside of particular spaces and times in the school setting (playtime and PE lessons) are almost by definition problematic: they have intruded into the disembodied space of the being-educated mind. This leads to two things that are particularly salient to my discussion. First, all visible bodies become positioned as inherently pathological simply by virtue of their visibility.[2] This is a major factor in the development of the cultural pathologies of childhood, which I shall discuss below. Second, it makes an enquiry into bodies and bodily practices within school stand out as strange and out of place.

Consequently, there are serious methodological difficulties in studying any aspect of children's bodies in educational settings. Because of the overall effacement of the body, it is actually quite difficult to notice children's bodies as individual entities in this context. This seems to be coupled with what is almost a form of political correctness among researchers: children's bodies are not expected to be remarked upon. Very occasionally, and in specific contexts, a body might be mentioned, either because it is remarkable in its athleticism (for example in noting that a boy's popularity is connected with his skill in football (Epstein *et al.*, 2001)) because it is unusual in some way (for example through disability), or because, in studies which focus on race, it comes from a particular racial or ethnic group. Researchers on gender might also tell us how particular children (usually girls) dress (Reay, 2001; Renold, 2001). Overall, however, researchers working in schools tell us very little about what the children they research look like; their bodies remain invisible to the reader. Researchers explicitly studying body image in relation to weight can run into difficulties just getting enough participants: Wills *et al.* (2005), for example, found that some girls withdrew from their study because they did not want to be weighed in school. The general research situation is not made any easier by the increasing regulation of the imaging and recording of children's bodies: for a researcher (or anyone else) to take photographs, for example, requires the explicit permission of parents.

The overall disciplinary context in which children are taught and expected to efface their bodies in school also makes it difficult actually to ask children what they think about their bodies. Although children talk about their bodies to each other quite a lot of the time, they do not expect to do so to adults. When they do, it tends to be hedged about with indirect allusion and a high level of embarrassment. In my own research into tomboys, for example, 11-year-old girls referred to the menarche in whispers and used oblique phrases such as 'you improve your body' or 'you grow girly bits' to describe adolescent physical changes. For some girls, starting their

periods meant that their physical freedom was immediately restricted. For example, some Muslim girls had to stop taking part in mixed swimming lessons or even to avoid the level of contact with boys that might accidentally arise in playground football. However, it was hard for us to ask the children about this unprompted, or even to follow up comments too directly, for fear of provoking their embarrassment. Conversely, Kehily (2004, p. 366), in a paper about the tensions of conducting research with girls, writes about her discomfort, 'knowing what I do about body image, fat and self-regulation' when, as part of her ethnographic research:

> I found myself lying on the floor pinching my fat bits, comparing the wad of flab squeezed between thumb and forefinger with that of other girls in the room. There were moans, waves of disgust and shrieks of laughter. Was this a scene recalled from adolescence or a more recent memory—a moment of weakness on a girlie night in with your mates? It actually happened during a research encounter not so long ago, while I was doing an ethnographic study in a primary school. The girls I was working with were age 10 at the time and I was, er, about 42 and three-quarters.

Researchers interested in children's bodies and body image are therefore, frequently torn between discomfort about how we are expected to behave, embarrassment in our research respondents, and potential suspicion from society, including the gatekeepers of the research itself.

This situation is compounded by the wider social context in which research on children and young people takes place. One of the effects of the twin disciplinary regimes of home and school is that those who resist or otherwise fail to conform to its requirements are frequently pathologised. Thus, in response to panics in the media and among policy-makers, researchers have frequently focused on what are seen as problems of childhood and adolescence: obesity (Gard & Wright, 2005); *anorexia nervosa* (Evans *et al.*, 2008; Rich & Evans, 2009); smoking (Cullen, 2006); drinking (Cullen, 2010); drug use; the 'ladette' phenomenon (Jackson, 2006); teenage pregnancy. While most researchers focus on one or two of these phenomena at a time, it seems to me that it would be helpful to have an overarching framework within which this work can be located, so that we can understand how particular behaviours can become the focus of media and policy panics, and what it is that they have in common from the disciplinary perspective. It is to this that I now turn.

Pre-disciplined, disciplined and undisciplined bodies

All these phenomena, it seems to me, can be seen as cultural, or metaphorical, pathologies of childhood and adolescence. Although some of them are related to potentially physically pathological states, they arise from the failure of, or resistance to, disciplinary processes. These disciplinary processes give rise to different ways in which children's bodies are perceived, each of which has its own pathology. I will argue that these 'states' of a child's body can be understood as forming a dynamic disciplinary triangle, with, at the vertices, the pre-disciplined body; the disciplined body; and the undisciplined body. Although different pathologies of children's bodies are primarily located at different vertices, there is both tension and movement

between them. The same body can be understood as pathological at some times and places and not at others, and the pathologies associated with each vertex may shift and move between them.

It is important to note here that all the cultural bodily pathologies that I discuss concern visible bodies, and that this visibility is directly related to the pathology concerned. Pathological bodies intrude into our physical space and our senses: they assault us with their presence. Even the anorexic body, which is often understood as striving towards invisibility, is made visible by the extreme nature of this striving. Rich and Evans (2009, p. 12) argue, indeed, that some of the anorexic young women they studied explicitly strove to reduce their bodies in order to be seen as individuals in school. They suggest that, for these girls,

> The body becomes a 'voice' through which to convey a message through which to ultimately subvert performativity, their embodied actions saying, 'look; now I have NObody, now see and treat me as a person, for who I really am'

All the other cultural pathologies of children's bodies are visible, simply and straightforwardly, by being inappropriate to time, place or expected stage of development. Consequently, while this visibility/invisibility axis is particularly salient at school, it can be seen to pervade society more widely. In this sense, the pathologically visible child's body is a pollutant. Douglas (1966) argues that dirt is, essentially, disorder, matter out of place. Similarly, the children's bodies that are pathologised are those which are not as, or where, they should be, and they therefore offend against the good order of schooling or society: their visibility is out of place in the contexts in which they appear, so that they are experienced as polluting (Figure 1).

The pre-disciplined body is that of the Romantic ideal of the child in a state of nature (Rousseau, 1762, 1979; Dewey, 1902). This body is both innocent and exploratory. It is without discipline, but, in contrast to the case of the undisciplined body, this lack of discipline is regarded as benign and finite. This is because the pre-disciplined body is temporally and spatially bounded, and there is, therefore, an understanding that it will become disciplined at appropriate times and places. It is, in

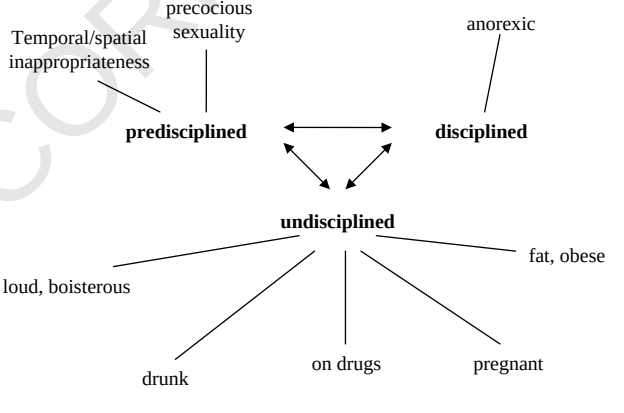

Figure 1.

the main, the body of early childhood, though some aspects of it, in particular its innocence, is expected to last longer than others. In time, the pre-disciplined body is expected to give a way to the disciplined body, which is pre-eminently the body of schooling and adulthood: the body which is contained in ways appropriate to the situation. This means that the same behaviour can be considered benign or pathological according to circumstances, and this can affect where children and young people choose to exhibit different ways of being. For example, Cullen (2005) found that young people wanting to drink with their friends in the evenings preferred the more relaxed spaces of the park to the confines of the pub. For them, the bodily discipline required of the latter location symbolised a form of growing up that they wanted to resist, preferring the pre-disciplinary playfulness available to them in more open spaces, though without, of course, the supervisory adults who would accompany younger children. They also saw their smoking and drinking as a passing phase, something that they would give up as they became responsible adults. In this sense, these young people understood themselves as being in a pre-disciplined state rather than the undisciplined one that would be attributed to them by adults and the media (Jackson, 2006). They saw their excesses as part of natural teenage behaviour and something that they could, and would, control in time. In contrast with these teenagers' desires to remain young and unrestrained, much younger children starting school often keep their bodies in exaggerated disciplinary check, as they consciously perform the role of schoolchild, asserting and confirming their new status as a 'big-school child' (Martin, 2011).

Pathologies of the pre-disciplined body fall into two broad types. The first is related to temporal or spatial inappropriateness: the body is behaving in a pre-disciplined way when it is considered to be too old to do so or located in a space where pre-disciplinary freedom is seen as inappropriate. If Cullen's teenagers behaved in the pub as they do in the park, this would be considered even more pathological, as would a child who persisted in behaving as if bodily freedom were permitted in school, for example by sitting underneath the desk if she or he felt like it. This also operates in the opposite situation: a highly disciplined very young child, who sits still and quiet rather than playing, is also considered pathological.

Such temporal inappropriateness is also involved in the other main type of pathology associated with the pre-disciplined body: precocious sexuality. This is a pathology around which moral panics are repeatedly constructed, and in which themes of dirt and pollution feature strongly. These pathologies are varied but cluster around an understanding that there has been a loss of childhood innocence; they range from concern about young girls wearing sexualised clothing such as very short skirts, cropped tops and bikinis, to media-fuelled fears about the prevalence of child sexual abuse. This pathologising of child sexuality and desire persists despite increasing evidence that many children have sexual feelings about and relationships with each other, some time before puberty (Adler *et al.*, 1992; Epstein, 1999; Scott, 2002; Blaise, 2005; Renold, 2005). There is also a sense in which precocious sexuality, particularly which associated with sexualised clothing and make-up, can be considered to be a form of inappropriate disciplining, or hijacking, of young girls by

the media. Thus there is a suggestion that the disciplining of the body, even in a non-extreme form, can be both a benign and necessary process, and something that causes pathology in relation to a romanticised conception of childhood innocence and pre-sexuality.

The disciplined child's body is, pre-eminently, the body of schooling. It is the body required by formal education systems: bounded, contained and under mental control. The most obvious pathology of the disciplined body is *anorexia nervosa*, in which the body's natural needs are subordinated to a constant discipline of starvation. Although in anorexia it is taken to extremes, this pathology is closely related to the more general effacing of the body that is required by the schooling process. Evans *et al.* (2004) argue that, for some students, the obsessive diminishing of the body that occurs in *anorexia nervosa* is related to overwhelming competitive pressures both to succeed academically and to do well in school sports. The result, paradoxically, is that schools ignore the body in the interests of elite performance, even as its needs interfere with that performance:

> KAREN: I was starved when I took my GCSEs. I wasn't eating and I wasn't drinking, I was sitting there and I couldn't concentrate. I was really dizzy.
>
> INT: Did your teachers know you were ill?
>
> KAREN: Yeah, but it was important that I sat the GCSEs and got the grades.
>
> (17-year-old girl with anorexia nervosa, quoted in (Evans *et al.*, 2004, p. 131)

For girls like Karen, the erasure of her body and its needs is an extreme form of conformity to the demands of schooling, a disciplining of the body that has gone far beyond reason.

The case of *anorexia nervosa* illustrates very clearly the tensions and slippages between the vertices of the bodily disciplinary triangle. It could be argued that the anorexic body is so hyperdisciplined that it has slipped beyond the owner's control into an undisciplined state. Certainly, once it gets to this stage, the anorexic body is no longer serving the purposes of schooling: a young woman who is too starved to concentrate is not going to learn very much.

Unlike more unequivocally undisciplined bodies, however, the anorexic body strives for invisibility, for erasure, even if visibility of the individual is also a partially desired state. Bodily pathologies that are clearly located at the undisciplined vertex, by contrast, are understood as pathological precisely because they make the body visible, when it should not be, and because what is made visible is the body out of control.

This is most clearly seen in the ways in which young people's horseplay and boisterousness in public places is often pathologised. Teenagers loudly larking about on the streets are treated warily by passers-by, moved on by police and shopping centre security staff and, in some areas, subject to curfews. Cullen argues that:

> The serving of anti social behaviour orders (ASBO), youth curfews, increased surveillance and the use of community wardens and police, serve to highlight that groups of young people are an unwanted and unwelcome presence on the streets, in

> parks and in playgrounds. In such legislation, Britain's 'homogenized' youth emerge at once both risky and at risk, ... somehow outside the definition of the 'public' who wish to use these public spaces. (Cullen, 2005, p. 1)

These teenagers may not be doing anything that is explicitly illegal or harmful, but their very presence as loud and large groups, the public visibility of their bodies, pathologises them anyway. Groups of young people who are not in school or at home (and so under the disciplinary control of teachers or parents) are considered to be a problem because they do not necessarily hold their bodies in check. They talk loudly; they leap about; they engage in low-level sexual activity. In some senses, they are engaging in 'private' activity in public. They are trying to take over spaces where they are not 'supposed' to be (shopping centres as places to 'hang out' rather than shop; children's playgrounds in the evenings (Matthews *et al.*, 2000; Cullen, 2007)). Their bodies are too obvious to loud, and in the wrong place.

The moral panics around teenagers in public spaces are related to another form of child body pathology: the drunken body. In recent years, this has become particularly associated in the UK with the image of the 'lad' and, more particularly, the 'ladette': a young woman who is 'crude, loud, bold, (hetero)sexually assertive, hedonistic and into alcohol and smoking' (Jackson, 2006, p. 11). Although this latter label was originally associated with post-school age women, it has filtered down to the teenage years (Jackson, 2006), so that moral panics around young people's drinking now firmly include a pathological child's body. Jackson and Tinkler (2007, p. 254) note the media association of young women's excessive drinking with other pathologised behaviours and problematic outcomes:

> Alcohol is presented as a major cause of alleged increases in 'problem' behaviours amongst contemporary young women ... For example, reports claim that some women get so drunk that they: lose keys or valuables; fight; have unprotected sex; lose consciousness; and walk home alone.

Binge drinking, particularly with an immature body is, of course, related to actual physical pathologies: excessive drinking really does carry a long-term health risk. At the same time, however, the current focus on this particular bodily pathology is also due to its visibility, and, especially, its visibility as transgressing stereotypical femininity. Bodies that are considered pathological because they are loud, boisterous or drunk are seen differently according to whether they are male or female (Cullen, 2007). Much of the current concerns about drunken, boisterous ladettes are very strongly gendered: Jackson and Tinkler (2007) argue that part of the moral panic around the emergence of the ladette figure stems from her appearance in previously male-dominated settings, such as pubs and bars. They note that ladettes are presented in the media as

> occupying space outside the traditional feminine domestic sphere, and crucially, as taking space once regarded as the principal or sole preserve of men. . .The ladette's visibility ... stems from her use of public spaces; she is portrayed as regularly frequenting pubs and wine bars. (Jackson & Tinkler, 2007, p. 254)

The loud, drunken body of the ladette is, once again, visible where it should not be, and this is part of its pathology. Jackson and Tinkler further suggest that the failure of ladettes to take on the previously common female role of keeping their male companions within bounds is part of their pathological status: their boundary-breaking status is understood as threatening to social stability.

The drugged child's body, by contrast, does not seem to be visible in quite the same way, at least as it is presented in the media. However, it is also classed and gendered, at least in some aspects. Newspaper articles and reports split into two broad categories. The first deals in a more-or-less straightforward way with statistics: information from research into drug use is presented as fact, though the headlines can be somewhat sensationalist. For example, in 2009 the *Daily Mail* (Daily Mail Reporter, 2009) and the *Daily Telegraph* (Devlin, 2009) reported that 'hundreds' of primary school children were being treated for addiction to alcohol and drugs the previous year. The actual total (given in the body of the reports) was 202 children under 12: this is not good, but neither is it 'hundreds' except in a strictly literal sense. Other stories based on reports from Government agencies, drug abuse charities and academic research present a picture of drug use by children and young people starting at a younger age than previously, and concentrated in areas of poverty, containing children with multiple problems or living in drug-abusing families. The second category tends to comprise much longer articles, focusing almost entirely on middle-class males, who are described as starting to smoke cannabis in their mid-teens, either becoming addicted to that, or moving on to something else, and thereby causing devastation to their families and themselves. In these cases, there is a strong underlying sense, not evident with the other child body pathologies, of these young men being a significant loss to society. They are supposed to be the next generation of the ruling class, but they are not preparing themselves for it by conforming to the discipline of either the family or the school. They are visible by their absence from where they, pre-eminently, are supposed to be, and be dominant.

The pathology of the child or early teenage pregnant body is again related to its visibility. In this case, the visibility is related to the precocious sexuality already discussed as pathology of the pre-disciplined body. It is important to realise that here, again, the pathology is one of personal temporality. Pregnancy is not in itself regarded, either physically or metaphorically, as pathological, but pregnancy at the 'wrong' time (too young or too old) is. It seems to me that the child's pregnant body is problematic both because it makes children's sexualities visible and because it represents and is seen as resulting from a lack of self-containment on the part of the pregnant young woman herself. It was only until relatively recently that young pregnant women were excluded from school as possibly contaminating influences, with serious consequences for their own education and futures. The early teenage pregnant body denotes failure: of childhood innocence; of the containment of young people's sexuality; of the disciplining of the child's body through abstinence or contraception.

Clearly, pregnant bodies can only be female. However, the precocious sexuality that a pregnant girl makes visible is already itself gendered. Concerns about sexualised clothing are entirely related to girls (indeed, it is unclear even what sort of clothing this

would mean in relation to boys). Although they are often blamed for buying such garments for their pre-pubertal girls, it is also mothers who take on the task of trying to keep the dress of their adolescent daughters 'respectable' (Hey, 1997). It is girls' loss of pre-disciplinary innocence that concerns the media and that is understood as a violation, at least as regards the heterosexuality that is clearly implicated in pregnancy. At the same time there is a sense from press reports that, while the precociously sexual girl is at least partly a victim (of the media, of fashion and potentially of predatory men), the pregnant girl is the author of her own destruction; she is pathological in herself.

Obesity as a pathology of the child's body is similarly popularly considered to be a failure of disciplinary containment. Childhood obesity seems to differ, however, from other pathologies of the undisciplined body in two significant ways. First, it is not temporally bounded: like anorexia, obesity is considered pathological at all ages. While childhood obesity is something that is a particular focus of moral panic (Gard & Wright, 2005; Evans *et al.*, 2008), this is part of a wider pattern of increasing obesity in the population as a whole. While there is some link in the popular imagination between out-of-order young people and violent or criminal behaviour in later life, this is much less strong than the perceptions that obese children are likely to become obese adults. In some ways child obesity is considered to be of especial concern mainly because it is the earlier commencement of a problem that was already in existence: newspaper reports focus, for example, on the increasing prevalence in the young of diseases of obesity, such as type-2 diabetes, formerly associated with adults (Campbell, 2007; Martin, 2007).

Second, the focus of the lack of discipline is different. In the cases of teenage pregnancy and drunkenness, the blame is laid firmly at the door of the young people concerned, and remedies for the lack of discipline are focused around the encouragement of abstinence and continence or the punishment of 'offenders' (Cullen, 2007). Similarly, although the uncontained behaviour of young children may be blamed on poor parenting (Connolly, 2004), this is not something that lasts into teenage life, and young people who transgress public norms of behaviour are likely to be punished as individuals. With obesity, by contrast, in the public perception the failure of discipline is located in the parent, particularly the mother (Martin, 2007; Martin, 2007). She is seen as not feeding her children properly, allowing them to spend evenings sitting in front of the television because she is working such long hours (Davies, 2007; Koster, 2007), being too fearful of outside dangers to allow sufficient energetic play (Gard & Wright, 2005; Ward, 2007), or insisting on driving rather than walking to school (Williams, 2007). This reflects late nineteenth-century concerns about undernourishment among working-class families, when the high infant mortality rate was blamed on the ignorance and carelessness of mothers (Dyhouse, 1977). It is notable also that, as Gard and Wright (2005) point out, the child 'couch potato' is usually depicted as male in the media: like her nineteenth-century counterpart, the feckless mother is ruining the health of her sons.

Conclusion: researching children's bodies in a world of disciplinary pathologies

The disciplinary pathologies of childhood are all related to the body's visibility. Conversely, in the school context, physical invisibility and self-discipline are of overarching importance. This means that pathologised bodies are very obvious within schools, but at the same time difficult to research. This requirement of bodily invisibility also makes non-pathologised, 'ordinary' children's bodies particularly hard even to notice within the schooling context, making them difficult to study as well, without rendering them implicitly pathological.

There are a number of ways in which we can work to overcome these problems. Noticing the failure to remark upon bodies, common to most research studies, is a good starting point. We can then consider what is left unsaid and why it might matter. This should lead researchers explicitly to take note of and investigate the embodied aspects of schooling, starting by simply noticing what there is to be seen. Overtly researching embodiment is, as I have argued, more difficult, but it may be possible to approach it by being open with children about the nature of pathologised bodies and discussing with them why this phenomenon occurs, thus simultaneously making problematic the pathology while researching its manifestations and effects. This was a potent approach in much early classroom research into gender, and would have the benefit of including children and young people more fully in the research process. Certainly, in the Tomboy Identities study, opening explicit discussions with children about the nature of tomboy and girly girl identities proved very fertile and elicited thoughtful and reflective responses.

The disciplinary triangle, as a broad theoretical framework, can be useful to researchers of children and their bodies for several reasons. It draws together a broad range of different cultural pathologies and shows what they have in common: resistance to and failure of school and family discipline. At the same time it makes clear the fluidity and slippage between the different pathological categories. It reminds us to look for links between different pathologies and consider the importance of 'race', social class and gender in their construction. It also points to the ways in which the body is implicated in these pathologies and to how the visibility of certain bodies is considered to be pathological in itself. The disciplinary triangle can help us to see what it is that we take for granted in children's bodies, and to point to salient categories for investigation. We might want to ask, for example, whether the pre-disciplined body really exists, or whether it is a relic of a Romantic image of childhood innocence. We can consider whether there are other pathologies of the disciplined body, particularly any that are related to boys rather than girls: we might, for example, look for evidence of young men spending excessive time on body-building or related activities, and consider why, if they are doing so, this has not become a focus of public anxiety.

The disciplinary triangle can also be used to make salient issues of gender with regard to children's bodies. It is striking how many of the cultural bodily pathologies only really apply to girls, or are seen as far more pathological in female form. It is

hard to imagine what pre-pubertal sexualisation would look like as applied to boys, and there is far more press concern about teenage mothers than about teenage fathers. We need to investigate both whether the cultural pathologies are reflected in actual behaviours (and statistics) and consider why it is that young women's bodies are so much more readily stigmatised than young men's.

As a theoretical framework, the disciplinary triangle provides a structure for bringing together the work of researchers from different fields in new and creative ways. It allows us to think about how children's bodies are pathologised as a general rather than as a specific phenomenon, potentially enabling much more powerful analyses. A useful way to start such research would be to flesh out the model with more detailed examples of the various cultural pathologies, working with specialists in the various areas and setting their findings against each other within the overall framework.

Most important, however, is that we need to find ways to make visible the bodies of all children, particularly in the disciplinary context of the school. We need to work out how to research them without implying that they are problematic, without embarrassing young people, and without making researchers complicit in practices with which they feel uncomfortable. We do need to understand how children and young people think about their bodies. At the moment most of what is in the public domain is what adults think, and that is not at all the same thing.

Notes

1. 'Tomboy identities: the construction and maintenance of active girlhoods'. ESRC number RES-00-22-1032, 2005-6, based at Goldsmiths, University of London.
2. In this context, what I mean by 'visible' is that it is something that gets noticed. Thus, for example, the mass of older boys playing football in most primary school playgrounds at break times is not visible in this sense, because it is taken for granted and so unquestioned. A girl playing alongside the boys as an equal, however, would be visible, in this sense, because she would be an anomaly.

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